



June 10, 2013

Kristen Conroy
United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region 1
5 Post Office Square
Suite 100 (ORA01-1)
Boston, MA. 02109-3912

RE: DEP grant proposal:

US EPA Wetlands Program Development Grant FY 2013: Pilot Chicopee Watershed Wetland Assessment; Climate Change Adaptation Strategy; and Wetland Restoration/Vulnerable Wetlands Outreach.

Dear Ms. Conroy:

The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC) strongly supports Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection's (MassDEP) 2013 grant proposal to the US Environmental Protection Agency entitled: *Pilot Chicopee Watershed Wetland Assessment; Climate Change Adaptation Strategy; and Wetland Restoration/Vulnerable Wetlands Outreach*.

MACC understands that MassDEP's proposal includes a request to fund a Technical Outreach/Wetland Information Resource (WIRE) Specialist. The specialist would facilitate MassDEP's statewide outreach and training on the new Ecological Restoration General Permit by doing the following:

- Work in partnership with the MA. Dept. of Fish and Game to develop the wetland/ecological restoration regulatory training materials
- Conduct at least six statewide workshops to provide guidance and regulatory assistance on how to apply the new wetland and ecological regulatory requirements
- Develop new electronic outreach materials, training on web-based platforms and appropriate social media venues.
- Develop new ecological restoration forms for filing permits electronically using WIRE.

For over 51 years, MACC has been dedicated to supporting Conservation Commissions through education and advocacy. Conservation Commissions are charged with protecting natural resources in their communities and administering the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (G.L. Ch. 131 §40). Every year, these local boards are relied upon to review and condition several thousand permit applications for work proposed in or close to wetlands and waterways.

MACC's most important public partner in supporting the 2,400 Commissioners in Massachusetts is MassDEP. We could not fulfill our mission to educate and assist municipal boards without the talent and support of MassDEP's expert staff, who provide critical services to Commissions including technical, administrative and regulatory assistance on complicated wetland topics.

MACC has verified that Commissions rely heavily on MassDEP by conducting a professional *Needs Assessment of Conservation Commissions* in 2009, followed by a survey conducted by the Department of Natural Resources Conservation at the University of Massachusetts conducted in 2010. Both surveys determined that Commissions need more technical assistance from outside experts and rely on MassDEP specifically to be responsive to their needs. The 2010 survey found that Commissioners need training to enhance their capacity to make smart natural resource protection decisions – especially training relevant to the scientific and technical aspects of their decisions.

MACC and MassDEP are natural partners sharing the same goal: supporting local decision makers' quest for self-reliance through appropriate support, training and access. MassDEP's proposal to conduct direct outreach and training to local officials, project applicants, and others will help decision makers properly and effectively apply the new regulatory requirements of the new Ecological Restoration General Permit, implement successful ecological restoration projects and ultimately protect sensitive wetlands and other water resources. MACC strongly supports MassDEP's proposal and encourages you to give it favorable consideration.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michèle Girard".

Michèle Girard
Associate Director